

3.04 BALAAM AND HIS TALKING DONKEY

NUMBERS 22-24

Moses was leading the Israelites, God's people, to the land God had promised them—the land of Canaan. As they got closer to Canaan, there were many towns they needed to go through on the way. Most of these towns would not let them pass through. Sometimes there was even a battle between the Israelites and the people of these different areas. God wanted the Israelites to get to the promised land. God would help the Israelites win the battles.

One day, Moses and the Israelites were camped close to the town of Jericho, in the land of Moab. Balak, the king of Moab, was afraid of the Israelites. He had heard the stories of how they had won battles in other parts of the land. King Balak sent his messengers to get Balaam, a magician who lived in another town. The king heard that Balaam had great success with blessings and curses. He would have Balaam put a curse the Israelites! The messengers went to get Balaam.

Balaam listened to the messengers' request from the king. The message said, "A great crowd of people are coming from Egypt to destroy our land. Come and curse these people, so that I may win the battle." Balaam said he would ask God to direct his decision. God told Balaam not to go with these men. Balaam was not to curse God's people, the Israelites.

King Balak decided to send even more important officials to Balaam. Once again, Balaam was asked to come visit the king and put a curse on the Israelites. The king offered to pay him a good amount of money. Balaam told the officials that even if the king gave him his palace filled with silver and gold, he still would be powerless against what God told him. God spoke to Balaam. God said, "You can go with these men to see the king, but you must only do what I tell you to do."

The next morning, Balaam went with the Moab officials back to the palace of the king. But God knew what Balaam was thinking in his heart. It made God angry that Balaam was thinking about disobeying God's direction. God sent an angel to block the path as Balaam traveled. The donkey Balaam was riding saw the angel and went off into a field. Balaam beat the donkey and forced him to go down the road again. The angel tried again to block them as the path became narrow. The donkey tried to squeeze Balaam's foot against a wall along the path. Balaam beat the donkey again! Then, the angel moved down the road to a place the donkey couldn't get through at all. The donkey lay down with Balaam on its back. Balaam became very angry and beat the donkey a third time.

"What have I done to you to make you beat me three times!" said the donkey. "You have made me look like a fool," said Balaam. "But I am the same donkey you have ridden for many years. Have I ever done anything like this to you before?" asked the donkey. Suddenly, Balaam saw the angel. He fell to the ground and said to the angel, "I have sinned. If you don't like what I'm doing, I'll go back home."

The angel told Balaam to continue to see the king, but only do as he was told by God. When King Balak met with him, Balaam told him, "I can only speak the words God tells me." And no matter what the king asked, God only allowed Balaam to bless the Israelites and not curse them.

3.04 BALAAM AND HIS TALKING DONKEY - TEACHER'S GUIDE

NUMBERS 22-24

HIGHLIGHTS:

- 1) The Israelites were camping near the town of Jericho, in the land of Moab. They had to fight battles on their way to Canaan, the land God promised them.
- 2) King Balak, the king of Moab, was afraid of the Israelites. They had won many battles. He sent for a magician named Balaam to come put a curse on them.
- 3) King Balak's messengers went to the town where Balaam lived and asked him to come back with them. Balaam told them God spoke to him and told him not to go with them. Then, the king sent more officials to ask Balaam again about coming to see the king and putting a curse on the Israelites. Although Balaam refused once again, God spoke to him that night telling Balaam that he could go with them.
- 4) When Balaam had been traveling for a while, an angel appeared on the road. Only Balaam's donkey could see the angel. First, the donkey ran into a field. Balaam beat his donkey. Two more times, the angel caused the donkey to keep Balaam from going down the road. Balaam got very angry and beat the donkey each time.
- 5) The donkey began to speak and ask Balaam why he was beating him. Then, Balaam saw the angel in front of them. He fell down and said he had sinned—that he would do whatever the angel told him to do.
- 6) The angel told him to go see the king, but to do only as he was told by God. When the king asked Balaam to curse the Israelites, Balaam told him he could only bless them, not curse them.

QUESTIONS:

- 1) Who was King Barak?
- 2) Why did King Barak want Balaam to curse the Israelites?
- 3) Why did Balaam refuse to go back with the messengers?
- 4) When the donkey saw the angel on the road, what happened?
- 5) After Balaam beat the donkey three times, what happened?
- 6) What did the angel tell Balaam?
- 7) What did Balaam tell King Barak when he saw him?

ANSWERS:

- 1) King Barak was the king of Moab.
- 2) King Barak was afraid of the Israelites. They had won many battles.
- 3) God told Balaam not to go back with the king's messengers.
- 4) The donkey ran into a field. Balaam beat him.
- 5) After Balaam beat his donkey three times, the donkey spoke to him. Then, Balaam saw the angel.
- 6) The angel told Balaam to only do as he was told by God.
- 7) Balaam told King Barak he could only bless the Israelites, not curse them.